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Lesson 9 — *Real Faith: Real Faith Rejects Worldliness (4:1-5:6), Part 2*

INTRODUCTION

In James 4:1-5:6, James fleshes out what worldliness looks like in five areas. In other words, he contrasts how the friend of the world vs. the friend of God handles these issues: desires (4:1-3), attitude (4:6-10), offenses (4:11-12), planning (4:13-17), and money (5:1-6). **Because friendship with the world is enmity with God, you must live as God's friend.**

ATTITUDE (4:6-10)

A second area in which we battle worldliness—fighting against living as the world's friend in favor of living as God's—is in our attitude. Verses 6-10 depict two basic competing attitudes—one that is godly and one that is worldly, one that epitomizes truth faith and one that undermines it. These attitudes are humility and pride.

Now these verses in particular present us with an interpretational challenge concerning the audience James has in mind. Motyer understands James to be writing to believers, while MacArthur argues that the author is addressing unbelievers. However, I think to take either position is to attribute too much to James—in other words, I'm not sure that James had such a black-and-white audience in mind. Consistently in this epistle, James addresses the double-minded and self-deceived, and he never clearly labels them as either believing or unbelieving. They may be believers, failing to practice their faith; or they may be unbelievers, mere professors with no actual possession of real, saving faith. I think James understands what his brother and Lord taught him—that tares can grow with the wheat and be virtually indistinguishable from it (Matthew 13:24-30; cf. Matthew 7:21-23).

Therefore, every professor is admonished to “examine [himself] to see whether [he is] in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Every Christian ought to ask himself if the marks of friendship with God (against the marks of friendship with the world) are present and growing in his life (2 Peter 1:8-11).

So, as we consider James 4:6-10 and this second battleground of worldliness (i.e., our attitude: humility vs. pride), we'll do so with a broad audience in mind and will thus make a two-fold application. On the one hand, there are some who have never humbled themselves under Jesus Christ, bowing the knee to Him, confessing Him as Lord, and crowning Him as King over their life—*positionally*, they are proud and not humble, and so they have not received God's forgiving and saving grace, and they are not saved. On the other hand, there are others who have put themselves under Jesus Christ in saving faith, but they now need to continue to *practically* live a life of humility that continues to enjoy God's strengthening and sustaining and satisfying grace. Therefore, the principles in this passage apply broadly to both groups, and to anyone who will hear this passage, we ask, “Whose friend are you—God's or the world's? What does your attitude say about the answer to that question? Are you proud and opposed by God, or humble and favored by God?” Remember, “friendship with the world is enmity with God.”

Now, let's consider our text. Verse 6 starts, “But he gives more [or, greater (NASB, NET)] grace.” James is highlighting a contrast—that is, as great as is our natural man's tendency to lust after ungodly fulfillment (v. 5), “greater” still is the grace of God to save and satisfy and purify us (v. 6a). What absolutely vital encouragement and stability for Christians who would evaluate the nature of their faith and find it to be true, but weak! Where sin abounds, God's forgiving, enabling, transforming, pleasing grace does much more abound—in fact, it now “reigns” in our life (Romans 5:20-21)! Motyer beautifully comments,

What comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect of our needs, he always has more grace at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient, he always has more and yet more to give. Whatever we may forfeit when we put self first, we cannot forfeit our salvation, for there is always more grace. No matter what we do to him, he is never beaten. We may play false to the grace of election, contradict the grace of

reconciliation, overlook the grace of indwelling—but he gives more grace. Even if we were to turn to him and say, ‘What I have received so far is much less than enough’, he would reply, ‘Well, you may have more’. His resources are never at an end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: he gives more grace.¹

In the second half of verse 6, James builds upon this hope-anchoring promise by quoting from the Septuagint rendering of Proverbs 3:34 (cf. 1 Peter 5:5). He writes, “Therefore it [Scripture] says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Notice that he transitions into this sentence with the word “therefore” (Gk. *dio*), which is meant to link what comes before with what comes after by providing the reason. In other words, the promise of greater grace is the reason that the Scripture states that “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Clearly, James is intending to narrow the promise of greater grace, for he knows that not everyone enjoys the benefit of that promise. This is why Scripture (originally in Proverbs 3:34 and later here and in 1 Peter 5:5) explains what kind of people receive God’s grace—namely, the humble (i.e., positional humility receives the grace of salvation; practical humility receives the grace of sanctification).

And, yet, for the careful pastor and determined reader, that new information is not enough either. Under divine inspiration, James must go a step further into application and explain the character of the humble. That is why he again uses a similar transitional word to lead into verse 7—“Submit yourselves therefore [Gk. *oun*, consequently] to God.” So, the reason the Bible tells us who can receive grace (v. 6b) is that God really does give a greater grace (v. 6a); the result, then, should be that we become one of those people who receive grace (vv. 7-10).² Put simply, “The truth is a superabundant supply of grace (6); the response is an obedient walk with God, itemized in verses 7–9.”³

We could chart James’ logic this way:

- Verse 6a — (what?) the promise of greater grace → “therefore”...
- Verse 6b — (who?) the people who receive grace → “therefore”...
- Verses 7-10 — (how?) the practice of those people

Or, we could offer it another way:

Reality (v. 6b) — principle
 “[Scripture] says, “God opposes the proud,
 but gives grace to the humble.”

Reason (v. 6a) — promise
 “[God] gives more grace.”

Result (v. 6b) — practice
 “Submit yourselves, therefore...”

Clearly, in addition to reviving us with the promise of God’s greater grace (v. 6), James also wants to remind us of our responsibility to position ourselves to receive His grace—both positionally/initially and practically/continually (vv. 7-10). Verses 7-10 contain ten commands to obey, and along this pathway humility is cultivated and grace is given.⁴ Yes, to navigate life and reject worldliness, God grants to true believers wisdom (James 3:13-18) and grace (James 4:6), but neither of those gifts are a means of instant and effortless sanctification. Instead, “the benefits of grace and more grace are ours along the road of obedience and more obedience. The God who says ‘Here is my grace to receive’ says in the same breath, ‘Here are my commands to obey.’”⁵ Indeed, as Jim Berg puts it, sanctification is a cooperative venture between God and man; it is dependent discipline.

What happens if we disregard the principle of verse 6b and the practice of verses 7-10, and hope to nonetheless lay claim to the promise of “greater grace” in verse 6a (i.e., “I want greater grace; I just don’t want to be one of those humble people”)? We will deceive ourselves, for James quotes Scripture and tells us that “God opposes the proud.” Again, there’s no middle ground or neutral territory—if you don’t humble yourself, then you’re proud. And just as God handles the humble in a very specific and concrete way, He will likewise deal with the proud.

| <i>Attitude</i> | Humility | Pride |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Practice</i> | 4:7-10 | 4:1-5 |
| <i>Result</i> | <u>Greater</u> grace from God | <u>Opposition</u> from God |

The word “oppose” literally means “to set an army in array against, to arrange in battle order”⁶; or more generally “to oppose, to be hostile toward, to show hostility.”⁷ So it is a fitting word to use alongside the military language that described the hostile relationships among self-

centered people in verses 1-3. As long as in their pride they fought and made war against each other in an ongoing spirit of selfish hostility, God would be at war against them. God opposes the proud.

Certainly not wanting to be in that camp, then, we return to the promise and principle that “[God] gives [greater] grace...to the humble.” Understanding the what and the who, we must give ourselves for the rest of our lives to the “how.” How do we cultivate that blessed characteristic of humility that brings with it the lavish grace of God? How do we “humble [ourselves] before the Lord, [so that] he [would] exalt [us]” with His favor (v. 10; Matthew 23:12)? James offers no less than four personal responses. Remember, a worldly attitude of pride rejects these responses, therefore betraying a stagnant faith (at best) or a fake faith (at worst). So, what is your attitude? Are these responses evident and growing in your life?

1. Allegiance (v. 7)

a. “Submit yourselves therefore to God.”

What — In keeping with the language James uses in verses 1-3 and verse 6, this word also comes from the realm of military. As such, it means “to rank under” or “to subject/subordinate.” It is a passive verb, which highlights that this is a choice that we must make for and apply to ourselves. In contrast to the combat between believers (4:1-3) and the military opposition from God Himself (4:5), we should be a good soldier who ranks himself under and subordinates himself to God!

Why — While this command suggests a voluntary *decision* (e.g., “I will put myself under you”), it points to a predetermined *position* (e.g., “I am under you”). In other words, we should make the *decision* to submit to God, because in our *position* we are under God. This word is used to describe the demons’ position under Christ (Luke 10:17, 20)—they didn’t nobly or obediently surrender to Christ; they were under Him! This word is used consistently throughout the New Testament to declare that all things are under Christ (1 Corinthians 15:27-28; Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 3:21; 1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 2:5). For example, Hebrews 2:7-8 declares, “You have crowned him with glory

and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.” Therefore, since that is our *position*, in our *decision*, we should not fight submission, but embrace it.

How — There are at least four ways that we should make our position-reflecting decision to submit to God.

- **Through subjection to the gospel (Matthew 10:39; Luke 14:27; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 5:24)** — Our greatest problem is that we have been separated from God; so, we must trust Christ to bring us back (1 Peter 3:18). We must put our identity, worldview, mission, and entire lives under the “good news” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We must embrace the message of the cross and empty tomb and allow it to define our entire lives. We must “confess with [our] mouth that Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9).
- **Through subjection to God’s Word (Romans 8:7; 10:3)** — We must surrender ourselves to the truth and teaching of God’s Word, lest we be opposed by God in our pride.
- **Through subjection to the church (Ephesians 1:22)** — We are not in practical submission to Christ, if we are not in submission to His body, His bride, His family, His household.
- **Through subjection in human relationships** — This same word is used to describe the position of children to their parents (Luke 2:51 of Jesus!), wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1), younger to elders (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Peter 5:5), slaves to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18), citizens to government (Romans 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13), and even believers to each other (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5).

To what extent — Hebrews 12:9 teaches us that we must not rebel against the yoke of submission, even when it means experiencing discipline and suffering. Now, we must endure in our appropriate loyalty to God! Jim Berg practices such intentional allegiance to the Lord by offering a simple prayer to God each morning—“Because of what He did in my place on the cross, what He has said to me in His Word, and what He will require of me at the judgment, I must live all my life under the lordship of Jesus Christ today.”⁸

b. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

What — The word “resist” designates more of a defensive, rather than offensive, posture. It has the idea of setting oneself against, planting one’s foot, and remaining unmoved. It’s the same word used in Ephesians 6:13 and 1 Peter 5:9.

How — 1 Peter 5:9 hints at how we are to resist, and it is certainly not in our own strength. That would betray an attitude of pride, which would actually be exploited by the devil and opposed by God. Instead, we are to “resist him, firm in [our] faith” (cf. Ephesians 6:10-18). Jesus provides us with the clearest example of how to do this, when, beset by emotional, physical, and spiritual challenges, nonetheless planted His foot and unwaveringly declared, “It is written” (Matthew 4:1-11). Faith-filled knowledge of, belief in, and adherence to God’s Word is sufficient to resist the devil and watch him flee.

2. Fellowship (v. 8a)

What — Pastor James describes the second response of humility with this command, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” This echoes several Old Testament passages with which James would have been very familiar (cf. Isaiah 55:6-7; Jeremiah 29:13).

Why — Fellowship with God is at the heart of salvation. John 17:3 says, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Our basic spiritual problem is that we have been separated from God, and so our salvation consists of being brought back to Him in reconciliation (1 Peter

3:18). Therefore, fellowship with God is the nature of salvation, and it is also the privilege of salvation. Paul counted all religious piety as loss compared to what he had discovered to be “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8; cf. Psalm 73:28). Because Christ has brought us back to and reunited us with God in a relationship of Grace, we are invited to enjoy that fellowship. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

What — “We shall, of course, find a tendency in ourselves to want to reverse this order. How easy it would be to keep a daily time with God if only we had, to begin with, a more vivid sense of his presence—in other words, we want the promise to come before the command! But we learnt at the outset (6-7) that *more grace* is given to those who set their feet on the path of obedience. God enriches with the grace of his presence those who obey his command to seek his presence.”⁹

How — There are many means by which we might cultivate fellowship with God in order to enjoy the humility of wisdom and grace. In addition to listening to and responding to the Words of God, prayer is a gospel-given resource for enjoying intimacy with God. Combining prayer with fellowship, Psalm 145:18 states, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16). Concerning other means for cultivating fellowship with God, Motyer writes,

*The first element in the conflict is this central battle to live near God, the battle for regularity and discipline in Bible reading, prayer, private and public worship, feasting at the Lord’s Table, devoting ourselves to Christian fellowship, cultivating every appointed avenue whereby we can draw near to him. Fellowship with God—and its consequent blessing of his fellowship with us—does not ‘just happen’; we cannot drift into it any more than we drift into holiness. It is our first obedience.*¹⁰

3. Purification (v. 8b)

Who — Both “sinners” and the “double-minded” are admonished to practice this third response of humility. These titles remind us that James has in mind those who claim to be saved, but may or may not be. Because their life is seemingly characterized by sin and duplicity, the jury is out, so to speak, and the realness of their faith is in question (cf. Matthew 6:24; 12:30).

What — James describes this third response of purification by exhorting, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” No matter whether we are positional sinners (as unbelievers) or practical sinners (as believers), purification should be a characteristic response of our lives. As ritualistic as it was in the Old Testament, so it should be regular in our Christian living—spurning temptation, putting off unrighteousness, putting sin to death, renewing our mind, putting on righteousness, cultivating growth, pursuing obedience (cf. Ephesians 4:17-5:18). Like Josiah’s testimony, when we realize that our life is not in conformity with the Word of God, we should tenaciously root out all deviation and replace it with all devotion and distinction (2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35).

Where — By commanding purification of our “hearts” and “hands,” James is applying it both internally and externally. Our “hearts” (i.e., motives, thoughts, intentions, attitudes) and “hands” (actions, speech, choices) should be holy, as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 3:3).

4. Repentance (v. 9)

“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”

What — In his summary statement in verse 10, James reminds us that he’s calling us to grace-giving (i.e., exalt) humility. His word “humble” simply speaks of “lowness.” This is the lowness that rightly evaluates oneself and is therefore “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). This low spirit takes sin seriously and honors God’s glory by jealously replacing one’s trite disappointment at personal failures with a deep grief for having offended God (cf. Psalm 51). It is “wretched” and sorrowful over sin, hating its deception, mourning its penetration, spurning its attraction, and yearning for its destruction.

How — The repentant believer remembers the paradox of Christian humility.

*Let me learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul.*¹¹

Therefore, to this individual, 1 John 1:9 is like the warm glow of an inviting cottage in the middle of a thick forest on a dark night—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (cf. Psalm 51:17; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 57:15).

Application: Notice what the humble believer looks like in vv. 7-10. He submissively chooses the right Master, while actively resisting the evil one (v. 7); he seeks to personally relate to God in regular fellowship (v. 8a); he works actively to bring his conduct and heart into conformity with God’s righteous standard (v. 8b); his exuberant joy in God’s gracious forgiveness is fed by his own sober evaluation of his sinfulness (v. 9); so, he appropriately and habitually humbles himself before God in need of grace, letting God be the One to exalt him with glorious salvation (v. 10).

The wicked, then, is the opposite. He resists God while fulfilling the desires of the god of this world; he runs from God in rebellion and hatred; he actively practices wickedness and ungodliness, despising righteousness; he is dulled in his conscience, feeling no remorse for his sin; he daily exalts himself, while belittling his Creator; and therefore, he will be humbled in eternal punishment.

What characterizes your attitude and approach to life—resisted pride or graced humility? What are you experiencing in life—are you living with the confidence of God’s favor or the frustration of God’s opposition? Remember, godly wisdom that flows from the gospel (3:13, 17-18; cf. 1:17-18) starts with a heart of humility (3:13) that demonstrates itself with a lifestyle of humility (3:17)—this is the essence of the “fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 9:19; 15:33). So, humility must be more than a profession; it must be a lifestyle. The moment of humble, obedient faith at conversion (described in vv. 7-10) must be followed with a life

characterized by vv. 7-10 to authenticate its validity. Therefore, in keeping with the “meekness of wisdom” (3:13) put away double-minded friendship with the world for single-hearted friendship with God.

ENDNOTES

¹ Motyer, 150.

² “James forges the link between the experience of grace and the life of obedience by means of two ‘therefores’ (6b, 7a). First, because *more grace* is available by God’s gift (6a), *therefore* (6b) Scripture makes clear by whom this grace may be enjoyed: God gives his grace to the *humble*. But this still leaves unanswered the vital question how we may take our place within this favoured category. *Therefore* (7) we are given a series of commands to obey which spell out the terms of a humble walk with God, commands whose effect is summarized in verse 10 as humbling ourselves before God, with the promised result that he will lift us up” (Ibid., 151).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Humility is a gift of God’s wisdom (3:13), which becomes our when we believe the gospel (1:17-18). Christ is Himself the embodiment of wisdom (Colossians 2:3), and when we trusted Him as Savior, we started to possess His wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30). Humility cannot be cultivated by man, for we are by nature proud (James 4:5); humility is given by God (1:17). Therefore, this passage is not suggesting that we can earn grace through our humility; instead, God’s grace is already ours—He merely dispenses it in proportion to our humble submission and obedience to Him.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 491.

⁸ Jim Berg, *Essential Virtues: Marks of the Christ-Centered Life* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008), 39.

⁹ Motyer, 152.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Carlisle, PA: e Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), xv.